


## INTANGIBLE INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE OF VELA LUKA: ORAL HISTORIES OF *FABRIKA*, *AMBALAŽA* AND *GREBEN*

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*This paper examines how the industrial heritage of Vela Luka is currently perceived and in what ways it can be revived, following the collapse of the manufacturing sector; namely Ambalaža (a tin packaging factory), Fabrika (a fish processing factory), and the shipyard at Greben. Based on participant observation, audio recordings and interviews with former factory workers, particular dichotomies emerge with regard to co-existing histories and narratives. These personal micro(hi)stories and local memories offer new insight into the perception and construction of industrial heritage and local identity.*

*This research, based on oral history and the ethnography of everyday life, represents a first attempt at formal recognition and revalorisation of the tie between industrial heritage and the memory of the local community in Vela Luka. We also discuss the role of informal and intimate memory pertaining to industrial labour; with special emphasis on the memory of female workers, and its importance for the formation of local working-class-centred heritage.*

**Keywords:** industry, women's memory, oral history, working class, intangible heritage

### INTRODUCTION

This paper draws on the research conducted in the years 2014 – 2018, supported by Siva Zona association, based in Korčula.<sup>1</sup> In 2010, one

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<sup>1</sup> <http://sivazona.hr/pages/industrijska-bastina> (Borovičkić and Vene 2015).

of the authors began conducting ethnographic research by recording the memories of her grandmother and her grandmother's colleagues. Formal research, as part of the "Industrial Heritage of Korčula Island" project, started within the aforementioned association and included more extensive interviews with both old and new informants, as well as systematic archiving and digitalisation of materials, audio tracks, photographs, etc. The project aims to encompass scientific and artistic recording, along with the interpretation and revaluation of intangible industrial heritage, which is primarily a collective memory. So far, a number of articles and expert texts have been published,<sup>2</sup> the topic has been presented at several international conferences,<sup>3</sup> and an art workshop with the local community is planned to take place by the end of 2018, with the aim of encouraging intergenerational connectivity.

The rich industrial history and heritage of the island of Korčula, as well as the recent decay of a large part of its industrial facilities, form the basis for this research. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the economy of the island of Korčula was largely based on its prosperous industry, which included shipbuilding, fish processing and the manufacturing of packaging, the textile industry and production of paint, adhesives, varnishes, as well as electronic devices.<sup>4</sup> Vela Luka is a small town with approximately 4000 inhabitants. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the landscape of Vela Luka was marked by four factories: *Jadranka* (the so-called *Fabrika*), a fish processing and canning factory founded in 1892;<sup>5</sup> *Greben* (the so-called *Škver*), a

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<sup>2</sup> Borovičkić and Vene 2016; Borovičkić 2014, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> 4th International Interdisciplinary Conference: "Memory, Melancholy and Nostalgia", Gdansk, 2015; 4th Anatomy of Islands, the symposium "Responsible Tourism on the Islands: Towards a Synergy of Tourism and Year-Round Life on the Islands", 2015; the conference "What Does Heritage Change?", Montreal, 2016; RSE Network International Conference, "Top down Meets Bottom up in Post-industrial Regeneration", Glasgow, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Numerous oil refineries and wineries are also a part of industrial heritage, but traditional olive oil production and winemaking have a long and specific history of their own. This paper is focused on the post-war period of industrialisation and modernisation in former Yugoslavia.

<sup>5</sup> On the east coast of the Adriatic, a total of 59 fish processing factories were founded in the period from the late 19th century to mid-20th century, 32 of which were on the islands (Starč et al., as quoted in Jovanović et al. 2010:156). The factory in Vela Luka was one of

small shipyard founded in 1948;<sup>6</sup> *8. mart* (the so-called *Ambalaža*), a tin packaging factory founded in 1965;<sup>7</sup> and *TEU* (the so-called *Elektronika*), an electronic component factory founded in 1974.<sup>8</sup> Agriculture had been the dominant sector in Vela Luka until the 1970s, when industry, commerce, tourism, health and other sectors took over (Barčot 1993:49).



*Picture 1: Shipyard Greben, Vela Luka, 1970. Courtesy of Udruga Likovno stvaralaštvo Vele Luke*

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them, and its founding was initiated by the Viennese industrialist Carl Warchanek, who bought a fish-salting machine in 1889 to Bobovišće Bay and started production in 1892 (as of 19 February 2017, the Vela Luka Municipality listed it on its website: <http://www.velaluka.hr/dokumenti.asp?id=120>).

<sup>6</sup> The Vela Luka shipyard was based on the tradition of the famous Korčula wooden shipbuilding. (Tabain 1993:91). The first shipyard was built by Marko Markov in 1930 (93).

<sup>7</sup> In 1951, the production of tin packaging began in a separate unit of the fish processing factory *Jadranka*. In January 1965, this unit moved from *Jadranka* to the packaging factory *8. mart* and *LIM Metal Industry* (*LIM metalna industrija*) from Zagreb, which led to the creation of the *Metallographic Combine Rijeka* (*Metalografički kombinat Rijeka*) (As of 19 February 2017, the Vela Luka Municipality listed on its website: <http://www.velaluka.hr/dokumenti.asp?id=116>).

<sup>8</sup> As part of the shipyard *Greben*, *Brodarstvo* functioned as an independent unit, which in 1956 became a separate work organisation *Obalna plovidba* (later *Dalmatinska plovidba*).

These industrial plants (except TEU) intensified their production during socialism, in the period of post-war modernisation and industrialisation, which significantly influenced local conditions and enhanced the standard of living in the long term. Industrialisation resulted in increased employment and improved living conditions and mobility, along with transforming the local space by loosening traditional social control (Cifrić 1987:41).<sup>9</sup>

## ETHNOGRAPHIC TURN AND RESEARCH POSITIONING

The dominant narrative adopted by experts and researchers with regard to industrial heritage is based on common historical insight and is mostly presented through articles published in local journals or almanacs, focused on factual aspects such as dates of opening, production capacities, lists of the owners and managers, economic plans and strategies, etc.<sup>10</sup> Conversations with informants and the inspection of archives, libraries and private collections both show that the official written history of industry is focused on the formal framework, representative and famous moments and achievements in the history of the factories.<sup>11</sup> Such material is limited by its singular perspective and has been recorded exclusively by men. There is a disparity not only between the narrowness of recording formal elements and the wide scope, complexity and subversiveness of the lived experience,

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In 1974, *Dalmatinska plovidba* joined the electronics factory *Greben-Elektronika*, establishing itself as two basic units of associated labour – *OOOR Brodarstvo* and *OOOR Tvornica elektronskih uređaja* (As of 19 February 2017, the Vela Luka Municipality listed on its website: <http://www.velaluka.hr/dokumenti.asp?id=117>). *Elektronika* is a newer factory with a much smaller economic and symbolic role in the community, and is, therefore, not included in this research.

<sup>9</sup> Numerous informants, female informants in particular, witnessed increased employment. Female informants were massively employed as minors, due to the increase of the capacity of the *Jadranka* factory and a shortage of workers, which will be referred to in later chapters.

<sup>10</sup> Several examples of articles written about the industry in Vela Luka: Gjivoje, Marinko. 1968. “Brodogradilište ‘Greben’ Vela Luka”, “‘Jadranka’ Vela Luka” and “‘Tvornica ambalaže Vela Luka’”, in monograph *Otok Korčula*; Tabain, Tonko 1993. “Prilog povijesti brodogradilišta ‘Greben’ – Vela Luka (1948.–1972.)”, in the almanac *Luško libro*, Vol. 1; Oreb, Franko and Zdravko Žanetić. 2001. “Uz 110-godišnjicu rada tvornice ribljih konzervi ‘Jadranka 1982’ u Veloj Luci”, in the almanac *Luško libro*, Vol. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Except for publications presented in recent years as part of this research.

but also in the representation and a kind of a “right to a voice” within the gender framework.

There was a parallel, non-official and “alternative” historical narrative of the place, particularly concerning the workers’ experiences of the factory, working conditions and everyday life. In order to engage with this alternative narrative and the potentials of oral history, more nuanced research and the methodological approach positioned within the ethnography of everyday life was adopted. This implied placing emphasis on the workers’ immediate experience. These “ins” and “outs” of everyday labour history remain in the memory of those who lived through them and that memory is a valuable source of information that can further be described as a memory of work (Pinar and Gimenez, as quoted in Castillo 2011:4).

The research started with semi-structured and informal conversations, recognising the extent of the unexplored topic, as well as the interestingness and “silence” of the female perspective. Further research confirmed the existence of a wider “alternative” narrative and extremely rich, emotionally powerful and vivid memories of the work in factories. Interviews with some of the informants were conducted several times, but this, however, did not diminish their interest in recounting their story. On the contrary, women proved to be a lot more open, honest, and engaged in sharing their experiences and memories of episodes which were sometimes more intimate. Through conversations held with women, it was easier to discover the unwanted, informal and living history of industrial work, probably in part due to their perspective on factory work remaining only at the level of family intergenerational storytelling. On the other hand, women, unlike men, were less burdened by the formalism of talking and representation. Their presentation is similar to the concept of subjectivity as referred to by Prica:

“(...) the ethnology of the everyday returns the subject to the people in texts of soft, subjectivist discourse which notice apparently unimportant details (...). That is the measure of mild, ‘moderated intellectual criticism’ which (...) is oriented to the undervalued corporeal nature of everyday life, the traditionally female, maternal domains of rear-guard cultural reproduction” (Prica 2002:165).

Male and female informants, whose testimonies were usually obtained through semi-structured interviews, were mostly employed in the factories

during the post-war period of Vela Luka's industry, and in the later transitional period.<sup>12</sup> Among them, women's memories appeared on several occasions as a kind of opposition, criticism and subversion of the representative narrative, especially when they talked about relationships of power, hierarchy, illegal work, politics and female subordination to the factory's managers. Referring to historian John Gills, ethnologist Renata Jambrešić Kirin underlined the role of women as keepers of heterogeneous, experiential anti-memory and "rivals" to official historical discourse based on authoritarian systems of knowledge (Jambrešić Kirin 2009:65). The interviews conducted with the managers and directors of the industrial plants and the town's mayor have revealed a perspective on industry more in line with the official and representative written narrative presented in existing literature. These antithetical positions were compared at the formal level and linked to a specific set of gender norms and roles espoused by all three plants in Vela Luka.<sup>13</sup>

When talking about the industrial heritage in Vela Luka, it is necessary to mention the canons of "intangible cultural heritage" defined by UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO 2003).<sup>14</sup> "Intangible cultural heritage" covers a wide spectrum of practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills and other elements that communities, groups or individuals recreate and recognise as part of their cultural heritage, transmitting it from generation to generation (UNESCO 2003: Article 2.1). "Intangible cultural heritage" is manifested, *inter alia*, in the domains of oral tradition and expressions, social practices, traditional craftsmanship, etc. (UNESCO 2003: Article 2.2).

In this paper, we argue that there is a need to expose working-class-centred histories on the island, based on the uses of tangible and intangible remains associated with the lives of the working class. Intangible forms of heritage include forms such as songs, poetry and traditions, which are

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<sup>12</sup> The number of informants interviewed between 2014 to 2018 is 35. Most of the informants (former workers) were born in the 1920s and 1930s. Respecting the will of some of them, we kept their identities anonymous and referred to them by their initials.

<sup>13</sup> A detailed gender analysis exceeds the scope of this paper. This topic was further elaborated in: Borovičkić and Vene 2016.

<sup>14</sup> As of 19 January 2017, the UNESCO listed on its website: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>; <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001325/132540e.pdf>.



perceived as some of the most powerful expressions of working-class heritage (Mizell-Nelson 2011, as quoted in Burger 2013:12; Bowan and Pickering 2011, as quoted in Burger 2013:12; Attfield 2011, as quoted in Burger 2013:12). Previously mentioned definitions of intangible heritage are set out in a broad sense and cannot be precisely framed, in the same way as the term culture is closer to a dynamic rather than a static concept. According to Šošić's definition, there are certain immaterial, spiritual components of the term "cultural heritage" that are linked to the concept of significance (*koncept značajnosti*), exceptional universal value or national heritage. In that sense, cultural heritage is an important aspect of identity of narrow and broad communities, and of each individual (Šošić 2014:859).

This is where we discover a vivid and rich local memory related to the experience of working in factories which, as the factories employed hundreds of locals, has profoundly marked several generations and almost every family in the village. The informants hold a strong sense of belonging and identity, as well as an emotional, private, family and economic connection to the identification with the factories. In that sense, the awareness of individual micro(hi)stories that are mutually distinct but also interlinked and upgraded can also be perceived as an intangible heterogeneous collection of identities and a multifaceted, multi-dimensional testimony of several decades of local history.

On the other hand, examples of tangible traces include the factories themselves, social housing complexes, sites of strikes and trade unions activities, as well as places of recreation and social life (Burger 2013:12). Within contemporary scientific discourse in Croatia, although evaluated and popularised as an important and ubiquitous phenomenon, industrial heritage has mostly been researched and presented through the tangible, spatial, urban, architectural, economic or historical dimension, with a potential for restoration and revitalization.<sup>15</sup> The identification and valorisation of industrial heritage became important in the 1980s, mostly

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<sup>15</sup> Key institutions and initiatives dealing with industrial heritage in Croatia are: the association *Pro Torpedo* from Rijeka, *Festival Željezara Sisak (Ironworks Sisak Festival)* and *Gradski muzej Sisak (Sisak City Museum)* based in Sisak, *Muzej grada Zagreba (Zagreb City Museum)* based in Zagreb, *Labin Art Express* based in Labin, art collective *OUR* based in Split and others.

through plans for the revitalisation and reuse of industrial infrastructure. It was predominantly focused on Zagreb; specifically, on Paromlin and Gredeľj (Bunijevac 2007:34).<sup>16</sup>

As Vela Luka's industrial plants cannot meet architectural or historical parameters for protected tangible heritage, the paper considers the construction of local memory associated with work-related culture that further leads to a recognition of intangible working-class-centred heritage, marked by industrial development and the subsequent decline.

### WORKPLACE, LABOUR AND FEMALE EXPERIENCES

Most of the interviews with the older informants about *Fabrika* and *Ambalaža* deal with the period immediately after WW2, marked by mass employment and industrial renewal.<sup>17</sup> Much of the early industrial period, the end of the 1940s and early 1950s, is recounted by the oldest Vela Luka inhabitants, who were, at that time, the youngest female workers recruited and sent to work in the fish processing factory *Jadranka*, starting their job before finishing their four-year primary school education.<sup>18</sup>

*The Seven-year Primary Education Act* was adopted in 1946, according to which all children were required to attend school for seven years (*seven-grade primary schools*) (Mirošević 2007:160). Considering

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<sup>16</sup> Even today, the key projects dealing with industrial heritage are located in Zagreb (Zagreb Industrial Heritage, initiated by Zagreb City Museum). As of 19 February 2017, the Zagreb City Museum listed it on its Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/ZagrebackaIndustrijskaBastina/>.

<sup>17</sup> During WW2, due to social and economic conditions, nearly all fish processing plants faced stagnation and a decline in production. In the post-war period, there were significant changes in labour organisation and ownership relations (...) For factories on the islands, in addition to the aforementioned problems, the biggest and most insurmountable problem was the lack of skilled personnel and workforce (Jovanović et al. 2010:157).

<sup>18</sup> "I was 12, I finished fourth grade, we went to work because we could not afford food, it was our salvation." (O. D., female worker formerly employed by the fish factory and tin packaging factory, interviewed in 2010). The informants also mentioned occasional extortion methods which were used to intimidate the families who were reluctant to send their daughters to work in a factory: "They told my father, who had a fishing boat, that they would not buy his fish if he did not send me to the factory" (M. O., female worker formerly employed by the fish factory and tin packaging factory, interviewed in 2015).



that this Act probably only applied to the children who began attending school that year, it was, therefore, feasible to have a third-grader working in a factory. As informants point out, although these girls were allowed to drop out of school, it was forbidden to employ children under the age of 16.<sup>19</sup> So, for the youngest, the first years of their employment went unrecorded and some even had two employment record books, one for in-house records and one for the inspectorate.<sup>20</sup>

The issue of employing a large number of underage female workers<sup>21</sup> opens up dilemmas and, among others, an interpretation according to which the decision to employ a young female workforce was planned by the factory management. D. M. pointed out the likelihood that these girls were deliberately chosen as workers:

“The question is why did they take 12-year-old girls and not 16, 17, 18-year-old girls? This is symptomatic. Why take the whole generation of 1934? This generation was literally sacrificed. The first group of women had it the worst; they were literally raised in a factory.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> At the very beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the same factory, under Emil Vučetić's management, prohibited the employment of children under 14. Source: Rulebook of the Worker's Work, Fund Cadastre Authorities in Korčula – Series Industry, year unknown, the Centre for Archival Collections Korčula-Lastovo.

<sup>20</sup> “I had two employment booklets, in case of inspection. Later, they did not acknowledge the first few years of my work experience.” (M. O., female worker formerly employed by the fish factory and tin packaging factory, interviewed in 2010). “We cried, my cousin and I, about where we were going because it did not have a good reputation. When I was under 14, I had been invited to work in the factory, and one year of my work experience was not acknowledged.” (M. P., female worker formerly employed by the fish factory and tin packaging factory, interviewed in 2010).

<sup>21</sup> The youngest female worker employed in 1946 was 12 – Anka Gugić, born Surjan (born in 1934). Statistics regarding the age of female workers state that there was: one female worker born in 1934, five born in 1933, nine born in 1932, six born in 1931, two born in 1930 and four born in 1929. Source: Register of Workers, no 1 – archives of the fish processing factory *Jadranka* 1892, the Centre for Archival Collections Korčula-Lastovo.

<sup>22</sup> D. M., the daughter of a former fish factory and tin packaging factory worker, explaining the context of her mother's difficult work experience and her lifelong lower status in the factories which she worked in (interviewed in 2016).

In the broader context of intense modernization after WW2, there were staff shortages on the islands during the massive reconstruction and industrialisation period (Jovanović et al. 2010:157). In 1946, *Fabrika* in Vela Luka employed a total of 83 female workers and clerks, and only a few men.<sup>23</sup> Explaining the argument about labour shortages, historian and archivist Tonko Barčot<sup>24</sup> states the following:

“Although it would appear that a third of employed underage girls in 1946 would constitute a large share, I suggest interpreting this statistic with caution. An underage girl at that time and an underage girl today do not belong to the same category. We should remember that, prior to WW2, girls finished school after four years of education. (...) After that, they were practically in the job market in a way. (...) A 12-year-old girl was free and certainly had a lot of experience performing manual labour on a farm.”

Post-war employment of underage groups certainly raises specific issues related to, among other things, the politics of that time, marginal aspects of employment, as well as the frequency and efficiency of such practices in other Yugoslav factories. In the case of underage female workers in Vela Luka, it seems these workers did not have much choice: “Who asked me to go to *Fabrika*? Nobody but trouble – it led me there. Who else was going to feed me?”;<sup>25</sup> that they had to work in extremely poor and difficult conditions, especially during the early period; that they had difficult access to education (not counting the subsequent additional “qualifications”), leaving most of them semi-literate and, thus, forced to remain in the same workplace;<sup>26</sup> and that, due to illegal employment during their first years of work, they were deprived of the work time accrued in that period.

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<sup>23</sup> Source: Register of Workers, no 1 – archives of the fish processing factory *Jadranka* 1892, the Centre for Archival Collections Korčula-Lastovo.

<sup>24</sup> Obtained through e-mail correspondence, 11 May 2016.

<sup>25</sup> J. S., female worker formerly employed by the fish processing factory, interviewed in 2010.

<sup>26</sup> In 1948, 25% of people in Yugoslavia were illiterate (Dobrivojević 2014b:22). During the 1950s, the so-called “qualification” was part of a wider campaign aimed at enhancing literacy and “enlightening the people” and was launched by the state in the context of *agitprop* so as to increase the basic level of education (Erdei 2006:211). In spite of that, a

It should be concurrently noted that, in addition to the frequent mentions of the hardships they had to endure, O. D. says: “I wouldn’t wish my youth or my past upon a dog, God forbid!”<sup>27</sup>, none of the workers approached this issue without recognizing the meaning, benefits and subsequent effects, both on the private and collective level. Their discomfort reveals the paradox of simultaneous satisfaction and dissatisfaction and, more often than not, remains at the level of a statement rather than revolt. The older informants often emphasize their sense of belonging, gratitude and nostalgia for socialism: “Tito filled our stomachs”.<sup>28</sup>

The industrial renaissance in the mid-1950s brought about a period of accelerated and increased production and improved working conditions. The new factory building for fish processing was built in 1954, with the third largest production capacity for fish processing in Yugoslavia. The old building was redesigned and Vela Luka got another new factory – a tin packaging factory (Šeparović 2005:37–38).

The new factory was considered to be somewhat better than *Fabrika*, whose main drawback was having to work in a polluted environment. A lot of women from *Fabrika*, which became infamous as the worst and toughest place to work in Vela Luka, came to work for *Ambalaža*, which offered a higher pay. I. M. S., a male worker formerly employed by *Ambalaža*, pointed out the differences between the old and the new factory, along with the “benefits” that women got when they switched jobs:

“It was a nice and easy job (except at the beginning), it was warm, no chemicals like in the shipyard, you didn’t have to be on your feet like

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lot of female workers testify to the absurdity and formality of the so-called *kvalifikacija* – the qualification programme they had to attend: “You had to attend the programme for 6 months (...) I went for a little while, then I said I would quit because I didn’t know anything (...) You had to use the map, do math (...) Those who could not do math – all the same, they would pass as well.” (M. O, female worker formerly employed by the fish processing factory and tin packaging factory, interviewed in 2010).

<sup>27</sup> O. D. female worker formerly employed by the fish processing factory and tin packaging factory, interviewed in 2010.

<sup>28</sup> I. M., female worker formerly employed by the fish processing factory, interviewed in 2016.

in *Fabrika*, there was no fish, no ice, you worked in dry conditions. The women were very satisfied there.”<sup>29</sup>

On the other hand, O. D., a female worker formerly employed by both factories, described *Ambalaža* in these words:

“*Ambalaža* ruined me the most because I had to work on a machine, with tin. There were times I could hardly stand up from the machine press. It was killing me. You had to pull the tin sheet and beat down with your foot. So noisy... I cut a part of my finger, but it healed. These were devilish machines, you had to be so careful and you had to meet your quota, cut a lot of tin if you wanted to earn something.”<sup>30</sup>

D. M., a daughter of one of the female workers, recalled her strong impressions upon entering the factory:

“Compared to *Fabrika*, it was horrifying in another way. You couldn’t even talk from all that tremendous noise, you had to go outside. I suppose the noise was so terrible because those were the most primitive of machines, there was even a lot of smoke. Some things that you had to do were very dangerous – you would put the tin under the press, beating and moving the sheet, with your fingers just centimetres away from the press. *Ambalaža* was different and yet just the same...”<sup>31</sup>

As for the *Greben* shipyard, workers’ memories mostly turn to a specific period; the 1960s and 1970s, the “golden age” that presented the most productive time when the shipyard specialised in fiberglass manufacturing, when the plant complex was upgraded. At that time, *Greben* enjoyed a noted status among other shipyards in Yugoslavia. Unlike *Fabrika* and *Ambalaža*, *Greben* started as a typical male industry based

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<sup>29</sup> I. M. S., a male worker formerly employed by the tin packaging factory, interviewed in 2015.

<sup>30</sup> O. D., a female worker formerly employed by the fish processing factory and tin packaging factory, interviewed in 2010.

<sup>31</sup> D. M., the daughter on a former fish processing factory and tin packaging factory worker, interviewed in 2016.

on traditional materials and it held onto its “male identity”. On the other hand, in 1961, when the first fiberglass boat was manufactured in *Greben* as a harbinger of a promising shipbuilding material (Tabain 1993:97), the shipyard started employing large numbers of female workers. They were hired to perform one of the toughest jobs “in the plastics sector”, in the often claustrophobic space of the lower deck and in tanks with extremely toxic evaporations. This position was specific and highly gendered, as well as physically invisible.

When discussing the working conditions in *Greben*, what dominates are stories about the efficiency, specificity and reputation of the factory as one of the most significant financial and symbolic bases of the town. *Greben* can primarily be seen as a symbolic “monument” of Vela Luka’s economic success and local pride that will later outlive both *Fabrika* and *Ambalaža*. It is important to recognise the value that the industrial sector had for how the workers physically and mentally shaped their identity, for linking with “effective labour” (Castillo 2011:6).



*Picture 2: Female work in fish processing and canning factory Jadranka, Vela Luka, 1950. Courtesy of National Archive in Zagreb*

## HEROISING WORK

Effective labour is inseparably linked to the heroisation of work introduced through Soviet concepts of shock labour and Stakhanovism. During the post-war period, Yugoslavia adopted the model of an individualised hero of labour. Putting into practice shock labour, heroism and emphasising the moral motivation of workers, the influence of the new, “recommended” self-sacrificing work and of the attempts at emancipating women through compulsory labour (Matošević 2015:47) is reflected in the dynamics applied to industrial work in Vela Luka. Although it is unclear whether material gain or symbolic acknowledgement played the key role in motivating competitive labour, today’s reflections by the workers on the honorary title of *udarnik* refer exclusively to the symbolic “moral” category.<sup>32</sup>

Of all three factories, it can be said that the most detailed, strongest and oldest workers’ memories are those related to post-war *Fabrika*. The informants often mention competition, some emphasise the fact that women, due to their outstanding work, would raise their own quotas, making their job even more difficult as a result. J. B.: “You were working more to earn more, and they raised the quota, but how could we know!?”<sup>33</sup> M. B.: “Since we were working to meet the quota, we would compete to see who would do more, who would stay longer, who would skip lunch. Always staying late, always first to come, never coming late...”<sup>34</sup>

Explaining the differences between the political strategies of the former so-called East and the former West, and the importance of symbolic compensation, Primož Krašovec highlights:

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<sup>32</sup> According to the Rulebook, the title of “udarnik” could be kept for three months and was accompanied by the awarding of an “udarnik” card, food, footwear, clothing, firewood and other privileges (Matošević 2015:55). On the other hand, in a time of accelerated industrialisation, the title of “udarnik” were profusely bestowed. Although it was envisaged that “udarniks”, as the most deserving members of society, would enjoy special benefits, the title of “udarnik” was in practice only an empty formality. A large number of rural and urban peoples’ committees could not secure the goods to which, in accordance with the rules of additional supply, the honoured workers were entitled (Dobrivojević 2014c:36).

<sup>33</sup> J. B., former fish factory female worker, interviewed in 2010.

<sup>34</sup> M. B., former fish factory and shipyard female worker, interviewed in 2015.



“The factory workers of the Socialist East are also overworked, exhausted, physically and mentally devastated as those of the capitalist West. (...) How to reconcile the objective success of industrial workers who modernised the country, raised the bar and created all of the available social wealth with their apparent subjective misery which has the same causes, stems from the same process as their objective success? The political strategy of most parties entails a symbolic compensation for the subjective misery of the working class – the workers are celebrated in mass rituals, on posters and monuments of heroic female and male shock workers (*udarnik*), given thanks during official addresses for everything they have achieved. The workers, therefore, receive a symbolic acknowledgment (...), denied to the industrial workers in the West” (Krašovec 2010:202).

The conversation with the eldest informants gives the impression that effective and shock-work was an efficient individualised stimulant, a moral category, a part of the initial worker’s zeal and a way to overcome physical and mental difficulties in post-war years – something which the informants are often proud of even today.

In addition to the title of *udarnik*, the *Directive on Allocating Transitional Flags to Work Collectives*, with criteria such as the best execution of the production plan and good work discipline, also acted as an incentive for competing (Matošević 2015:105). *Fabrika*’s large hall was filled with elongated tables with 12 women gutting fish. Some tables won flags for outstanding productivity and effort, which was and still is a source of pride for the workers – M. B.:

“The flag was placed on the table of the collective who did the most work. We, from Pinski rat, were always the best ones. It was a Yugoslav flag and it was always on our table; they would also make us fried scones as a reward”.<sup>35</sup>

Most of the older informants emphasise the uniqueness of this group of women who, in addition to exceeding their quotas, filled the entire factory with song. M. P.:

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<sup>35</sup> M. B., female worker formerly employed by the fish processing factory and tin packaging factory, interviewed in 2010.

“When I would pass below *Fabrika*, I would hear them sing, and I wouldn’t move an inch, because even a stone would come and listen to that if it could.”<sup>36</sup>

As mentioned before, the memories of working in the factories of Vela Luka, especially *Fabrika* and *Ambalaža*, evoke ambivalent narratives and conflicting feelings. At times, memories of this period could be attributed to feelings of nostalgia for lost youth and the dissatisfaction with the current political and economic situation. In addition to the ideological constructs of socialism, the position of the former worker can be linked to the wider concept of the modern belief in the future and progress, whereas it also reveals a clear paradigm shift, signifying the end of the modern era. Among others, the decisive element for understanding the structure and practice of socialism is a command economy based on industrial work as a precondition for the accelerated modernisation of society (Paić 2014:9). The prefixes post-, neo-, meta-, and trans- are connected to the redirection of ideas with which modernity once started in the fury of progress, and later ended as a paradigm of melancholy and decline, as the global order of neoliberal dystopia (ibid.:6–7). It could be argued that the informants observe the new social and political circumstances from a “bound” perspective, projecting the values of work and asceticism established during the early stages of socialism onto the present time, which they simultaneously experience as “worse” – without a clear vision of a sustainable future; and “easier” – with better living conditions and higher standards.

J. S.:

“You had 40 days of maternity leave, and I came back to work even earlier than that. Women now spend 3 years at home and say ‘we can have it all’ – but what can we have?! Wages were always pitiful, only things weren’t so expensive, you would go forward and now, we’re moving backwards...”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> M. P., female worker formerly employed by the fish processing factory and tin packaging factory, interviewed in 2010.

<sup>37</sup> J. S., female worker formerly employed by the fish processing factory, interviewed in 2010.

The “silenced” histories of the workers and their subsequent marginalisation have been further accentuated by recognising today’s regression as part of the “post-*udarnik*” and transitional period, with which the older informants find it difficult to identify. Matošević states that the notion of the “forgotten *udarnik*” enables us to trace the “granted” habilitation and “relocation” of socially-marginalised work into the symbolic centre, as well as the subsequent return to the “margins of society” (...). The fact that the “symbolic residue” in the post-*udarnik* period is not “marketable” in any form has resulted in what we might call the “*udarnik*’s melancholy” (Matošević 2015:132).

Still, to initiate discussion regarding the memory of *udarniks* is to encourage the local community to reflect on the working-class lifestyle in the contemporary context. The narration of memories related to the local *udarnik* history is an important element of intangible industrial heritage. They also prove to be very much alive in the current oral history of our informants. As a matter of fact, these bittersweet memories enable them to relate quite directly to their personal tie to industrial labour, the physical space of industrial architecture and the social relation they built while working there.



*Picture 3: Ship Kar in front of the fish processing and canning factory Jadranka, Vela Luka, year unknown. Courtesy of Udruga Likovno stvaralaštvo Vele Luke*

## INDUSTRY IN THE PERIOD OF TRANSITION

The period of transition brought dramatic changes to the local economy in Vela Luka. A disregard for agricultural production, the low price of agricultural products, dependence on foreign loans<sup>38</sup> and structural discrimination of poor parts of Yugoslavia that produced raw materials were slowly affecting and weakening industrial production (Dobrivojević 2014a:35). At the same time, the Yugoslavian model of industry was not sustainable as it was invasive, over-productive and ecologically problematic<sup>39</sup> (Cifrić 1987).

The Croatian economy suffered through deindustrialisation, which was a result of the collapse of the socialist regime, the development of heavy industry, the civil war in the 1990s, coupled with material loss, liberalisation through the process of transition and market deregulation (loss of the ex-Yugoslav market) (Penava and Družić 2014:161).<sup>40</sup> Croatia's accession to the EU lasted for 10 years, which entailed the weakening of the competitiveness of the local economy, exacerbating tensions between the left-wing and right-wing parties (Aralica 2014:41).

The *Greben*, *Jadranka* (*Fabrika*) and *Ambalaža* factories closed down, all of the workers were left jobless, and the real estate was put up

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<sup>38</sup> Different stabilisation programs in 1993 (implemented by the International Monetary Fund) with a wider neoliberal agenda promoted privatisation, financial consolidation and economic dependence on developed Western countries. Industry became increasingly uncompetitive, which gradually brought changes in the economy that was restructured from an industrial to a service-based economy. Further on, in the early 2000s, different bank loans from the privatised banking sector were the main driving force of growth. These loans were directed towards financing consumer consumption. On the other hand, these loans motivated developers and encouraged the flourishing of the construction sector (Mihaljević 2014:58).

<sup>39</sup> Ecological issues were visible in Vela Luka as well. The sea was polluted by the fish industry located at the entrance to the bay. On the other hand, the shipyard was dominant and positioned in the urban context, thus negatively affecting the visual perception of the city, especially in the context of growing tourism.

<sup>40</sup> In the eighties, industry employed around 700 000 people and contributed 30% of the national GDP. On the other hand, in 2010 the GNP contribution decreased to only 13.6% and it employed only 219 900 people. Therefore, it can be said that the country suffered extreme deindustrialisation (Aralica 2014:39).

for sale. The destruction of the *Greben* shipyard slowly began as early as 2002, with the culmination of several unsuccessful directorships that lead to enormous losses and, on many occasions, even bankruptcy. During the 1960s and early 1970s, *Greben* had the most diversified production, ranging from lifesaving equipment and lifeboats to fishing vessels, patrol boats, landing crafts, fast boats, passenger boats and sailing yachts. According to the informants, it employed up to 500 people in that period (working in three daily shifts), thus providing wages, paid vacation, healthcare and a regular daily meal.

D. P. remembers:

“There were many of us. Everyone did something. There was enough work; to put it simply – there was work. The factory worked day and night. Everything was paid very well. We had days off, holidays, sick leave, overtime. We even got money for funerals. They covered the expenses of my *in vitro* procedure, and I went four times”.<sup>41</sup>

In 2016, the factory filed for bankruptcy, leaving the remaining 120 employees jobless.<sup>42</sup>

The story of *Jadranka* is somewhat similar to *Greben*. The factory had a lot of successful moments, one of which was the period of the late 1960s and 1970s, when production grew dramatically, as did the number of employees (around 200). The crisis in the fishing industry, together with the unsuccessful management of the factory, resulted in its closure in 2005. Some of the spaces are still being used, but only as cold stores and storage rooms for local fishermen. This is also about to change as the local government initiated a big infrastructural project for the construction of a new ferry port on the site.

The *Ambalaža* factory was established in 1965, employed up to 60 people and started with the production of packaging for the fish industry. The 1990s also brought different restructuring and conversions. Finally, in the late 2000s, *Ambalaža* was struck by the crisis in the fishing industry, which soon led to bankruptcy and the dismissal of the workers employed

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<sup>41</sup> D. P., female worker formerly employed by the shipyard, interviewed in 2016.

<sup>42</sup> Source: Uzinić 2016.

there. The factory was up for sale until recently, when it was bought by a private owner in 2016.

In such a social and economic context, it seems even more important to record the memories of the workers reflecting on their working-class culture in a diachronic discourse, as an incentive for dialogue or a corrective social model. This could trigger a move from memory to action, an invigoration of and education on continued struggles for workers' rights and better working conditions through the memorialisation of past workers' experiences, movements and strikes, with the aim of creating meaningful change for the future (Sevcenko, as quoted in Burger 2013:7).

When talking about the “future” in Vela Luka and the post-industrial period, it is obvious that the service sector was supposed to replace the loss produced by the ruined industrial sector. It was primarily tourism that was seen as a force of economic growth. This is the case with the island of Korčula (specifically in Vela Luka), where tourism is used to replace the central role industry had played earlier.<sup>43</sup> The mayor recognised tourism (the service sector) as the future plan for Vela Luka:

“The specialised medical rehabilitation hospital *Kalos* is, I would say, the last chance for Vela Luka. There will always be sick people so clients for this hospital are here. So, I think we should try and develop health tourism which would rely on the *Kalos* hospital, but we need to build more infrastructure, we need to be present in the European market and actively work 365 days. I believe that is possible!”<sup>44</sup>

He also highlighted the importance of the industrial and production sectors in Vela Luka, stating that

“it is impossible to rely exclusively on tourism and the service sector. If there is no production, there is no future for Vela Luka. We will try and open new production facilities, and if that doesn't work, we are doomed.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> On islands such as Cres, Lošinj and Korčula, the closure of fish processing factories did not have a significant impact on the population since that industry was replaced by others, namely tourism and shipbuilding (Jovanović et al. 2010:160).

<sup>44</sup> T. G., the mayor of Vela Luka Municipality, interviewed in 2016.

<sup>45</sup> T. G., the mayor of Vela Luka Municipality, interviewed in 2016.



Modern Vela Luka mostly developed in the second half of the 20th century, an extremely productive period that defined not only its present appearance, but also created the foundations for the functioning of the city, as well as public infrastructure that is still in service: the health resort *Kalos*, hotel accommodation, the nursing home, the hospital, the high school, the cultural centre, roads, water supply, the ferry terminal, etc.<sup>46</sup> These elements can be seen as a link between the past and the present, industrial and post-industrial, socialism, transition and capitalism, or simply – the present and past generations. In the discussion about the current state of the economy in Vela Luka, D. M. states:

“This unfortunate generation of our mothers, these women who were the first ones to get the job in the factory, had to carry this enormous burden. And they made it all possible; building the houses, ships, summer houses...”

The combination of policies of full employment, ideologies of collective ownership, and social construction of identity through productive work meant that a job not only provided a wage, but also mediated a set of social, economic and cultural relations between the individual and the wider community (Pine and Bridger 1998:8). Bringing together the voices of the workers presents an attempt at the valorisation of their local working-class-centred heritage which seems to be disappearing in light of rapid post-industrial change.



Picture 4: Paper wrapper for cans, fish processing and canning factory Jad-ranka, Vela Luka, 1970's. Courtesy of Centre for Archival Collections Korčula-Lastovo

<sup>46</sup> As of 19 February 2017, the Vela Luka Municipality listed it on its website: [http://www.velaluka.hr/vela\\_luka.asp?id=11](http://www.velaluka.hr/vela_luka.asp?id=11).

## CONCLUSION

In order to attest to the workers' experiences of factory labour, working conditions and everyday life in the second half of the 20th century, a methodological approach positioned within oral history and the ethnography of everyday life was required, focusing on parallel and "alternative" historical narratives. In this context, women's memory proved to be more open and less burdened by factographic formalism of telling and representation. The discovered subjectivity, micro(hi)stories and the lived experience allowed, among other things, to form a kind of opposition to the dominant presentation of the local industry, but also a more complex view and awareness of the rich intimate, emotional and familial categories of intangible industrial heritage. This heritage is recognised through the concept of significance (*koncept značajnosti*) and is reflected in a strong collective memory and specific work experience that has mentally and physically marked several generations, and is today dominantly inherited through familial oral history.

The phenomenon of *udarnik*, the success of industry in Vela Luka, especially the perseverance of the female workers in *Fabrika* and *Ambalaža*, and also the productivity and specificity of production in *Greben*, are an important aspect of local pride and identification with industrial heritage, and, subsequently, of the valorisation of working-class-centred heritage. The examples of working conditions in factories discussed through the interviews and "informal conversations" show how, in the context of industrial Vela Luka, the oldest stories are very often subject to incoherence of memory, including opposed perspectives and testimonies, due to differently conditioned moments of remembering and interpreting. Those ambivalent valorisations often marked the workers' memories in heterogeneous, ambiguous and multi-layered testimonies that require further research.<sup>47</sup>

Since there are no consistent plans for the regeneration of the industrial plants in Vela Luka at the time of writing, this paper can be regarded as an attempt at the (re)valorisation of intangible industrial heritage, manifested in working class testimonies and the memories of the workers, and their

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<sup>47</sup> For example some of the informants stress the 'benefits' that women got when they switched jobs from *Jadranka* to *Ambalaža* while others remember that new positions in *Ambalaža* ruined their health.

inseparable tie to the present identity of the local community. Our initial goal was also to create a basis for future collaboration with artists. We see this as an opportunity to reintroduce topics focusing on industrial labour, female memory and working-class heritage to the community of Vela Luka. We are working on different participatory methodologies implemented by artists through workshop formats, bringing together local participants of diverse generations. Our idea is to continue discussing the relations between industrial heritage and local identity, and how they are being transformed and translated for the younger generations (born after 2000). In this way, we are also able to put our ethnographic research directly into practice.<sup>48</sup> This also gives us a chance to discuss parts of our research and working materials together with our informants and the broader local audience. Through direct engagement, we are trying to invent a sustainable way of being in the community and narrating multiple post-industrial realities in Vela Luka. We are still examining and testing to see which means should be used to keep the intangible aspects of Vela Luka industrial heritage alive and, at the same time, relevant for the locals.

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<sup>48</sup> This research, thus, served as a starting point for the artistic research later conducted in Vela Luka in collaboration with the artist Božena Končić Badurina.

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## NEMATERIJALNA INDUSTRIJSKA BAŠTINA VELE LUKE: USMENE POVIJESTI *FABRIKE*, *AMBALAŽE* I *GREBENA*

U radu se propituje trenutna percepcija industrijske baštine Vele Luke i na koji način se može oživjeti nakon urušavanja proizvodnog sektora (Ambalaže – tvornice limene ambalaže, Jadranke - tvornice za preradu ribe i brodogradilišta Greben). Temeljem sudjelujućeg promatranja, audio zapisa i intervjua s bivšim tvorničkim radnicima/cama primjećujemo određene dihotomije u odnosu na supostojeće povijesti i naracije. Osobne mikro povijesti i lokalna sjećanja nude novi uvid u percepciju i izgradnju industrijske baštine i lokalnog identiteta.

Ovo istraživanje, temeljeno na usmenoj povijesti i etnografiji svakodnevnog života, predstavlja prvi pokušaj formalnog priznavanja i revalorizacije veze između industrijske baštine i sjećanja u lokalnoj zajednici u Veloj Luci. Također, raspravljamo i o ulozi neformalne i intimne memorije koja se odnosi na industrijski rad, s posebnim naglaskom na sjećanje radnica i njihove važnosti za formiranje lokalne baštine radničke klase.

**Ključne riječi:** industrija, žensko sjećanje, usmena povijest, radnička klasa, nematerijalna baština



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